

April 4, 2001

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft
Attorney General of the United States
Department of Justice
10th and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We welcome the President's commitment in his address to Congress to end racial profiling, and thank you for pledging to address this problem early in your tenure as Attorney General.

Racial profiling by law enforcement agencies is a clear violation of constitutional protections of equal protection and an affront to fundamental American principles of freedom. Racial profiling also dangerously undermines the trust that law enforcement agencies must work so hard to develop with the communities they are charged to protect and serve. Nevertheless, statistical evidence gathered in the course of litigation has demonstrated that racial profiling is endemic.

That is why we applaud your statement that racial profiling should be ended and that Congress should authorize a nationwide study to give us a more comprehensive picture of the problem. We are currently drafting legislation to provide for the gathering of data and other measures to eliminate racial profiling as a law enforcement tool. Your suggested six-month timetable for legislative action sends a significant message about the importance of the issue.

In the meantime, however, we urge you to use your existing statutory authority to take steps now to address racial profiling. First, we urge you to increase the Department's commitment to enforcing the current laws against police misconduct by lifting the freeze on hiring in the Civil Rights Division and funding no less than an additional 10 attorneys in the Special Litigation Section of the Civil Rights Division.

Second, we urge you to begin working now with state and local law enforcement officials to implement the "Principles for Promoting Police Integrity," which were published by the Department in January 2001. These principles, which were developed with significant input from the law enforcement community, promote police "best practices" such as non-discriminatory policing, accountability schemes, and employment practices that promote diversity in law enforcement.

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We look forward to working with you and the President to ensure that racial profiling is eliminated once and for all.

Sincerely,

s/John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee

s/Russell D. Feingold
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Subcommittee
on Constitution, Federalism and
Property Rights

s/Robert Menendez
U.S. Representative

s/Jon S. Corzine
U.S. Senator

s/Donald M. Payne
U.S. Representative

s/Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Senator

cc: F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee

Orrin G. Hatch, Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee

Patrick J. Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee